

THE
Christian History;


Saturday MARCH 3. 1743, 4. \$ N^o. 5.

Containing Accounts of the Propagation and Revival
of Religion ; more particularly

- I. Authentick Accounts from Ministers and other creditable Persons of the Revival of Religion in the several Parts of NEW-ENGLAND.
- II. Extracts of the most remarkable Pieces in the *weekly Histories* of Religion, and *other Accounts*, PRINTED both in *England* and *Scotland*.
- III. Extracts of WRITTEN LETTERS both from *England, Scotland, New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, South-Carolina, and Georgia*, of a religious Nature, as they shall be sent hither from creditable Persons and communicated to us.
- IV. In Intervals of fresh Occurrences, and on other Occasions, it is proposed to give the Reader the *most remarkable Passages Historical and Doctrinal*, out of the most famous OLD WRITERS both of the Church of *England* and *Scotland* from the Reformation, as also the *first Settlers* of *New-England* and *their Children* : that we may see how far their pious *Principles* and *Spirit* are at this Day revived ; and may guard against all Extreams.



Christian History



Having by the divine Assistance, which we desire thankfully to acknowledge, been carried thro' the Labours of collecting and publishing the CHRISTIAN HISTORY for one Year, to the Acceptance of many pious People; and being desired to proceed in the like Method: We have determined, with a humble Dependance on the same Assistance, to comply with their Desire: In Hopes the Rev. Ministers will send us ACCOUNTS of the Revival of Religion in the Places where they live or are well acquainted with, in this Country and the neighbouring Provinces.

We begin with a valuable Extract from an excellent Treatise of the Reverend & Learned Mr. JOHN WILSON, M.A. some time of Katherine's Hall in Cambridge in England. It was written in Answer to two Socinianizing Dutch Authors, who wrote against the special Operations of the HOLY SPIRIT on the Souls of Men, in spiritual Illumination, Distresses Joys &c. was licensed by Mr. Sill Chaplain to Dr. Sheldon Archbishop of Canterbury, in Dec. 1676, and printed 1677.

S E C T. I.

BEFORE I shut up my Discourse, I cannot let pass, without some *Animadversion*, what *Lud. Wolzogen* hath written in the latter Part of his second Book, *De Scripturarum Interprete*: where he thinks it not enough to have owned and applauded the *Exercitator's* profane Scoff at the Doctrine of the Reformed Churches about the SPIRIT's enlightening, as a Piece of Enthusiasm, the Effect of a deluded Fancy, attributing that to the SPIRIT of GOD that is the natural Effect of the Mind, or the Apprehension of some imaginary Good. But (as if he were glad of such an Occasion)

he breaks forth into a most bitter *Invective* against the *Doctors* and *Professors* of the reformed Religion, (for that his Aim is at them, is evident by the whole *Series* of his Discourse, notwithstanding all his Palliations) for owning and maintaining any such supernatural and immediate Operations of the SPIRIT; and daringly ascribes all to the Heats of an exalted Imagination, or the Vapours of melancholick Blood, and the unusual Joys of a recreated Temperament, or perhaps to the clearer Light of some discovered Truth, and sometimes to the deceitful Dreams or wild Commotions of a distracted Mind, falsely conceited to be the divine Breathings of the HOLY SPIRIT: And this he especially censures in those, who having attained to some eminent Gifts of Utterance, a tenacious Memory, a lively & ready Fancy, with a fluent Elocution, are fervent in their Devotions; whose Performances, he says, are cryed up for the Actings of the SPIRIT: not that the Persons thus qualified are so weak, as to think that this comes from the SPIRIT of GOD; but that they are willing others should believe so, that they may make the better Advantage of such a Reputation to gain Power into their Hands, and as a Torrent carry all before them, filling all with Schism and Sedition. This is the Sum of his angry Rhetorick in this Matter. And his Friend *Velthuisius* speaks in the same Dialect. *De usu ration. in Theolog. p. 71, 72.* And no doubt there are others in the World of like Mind with them: by whom those strong Impressions of Joy or Sorrow that are made upon the Hearts of Christians from the Sense of Sin and Wrath on the one Hand, or of the saving Love of GOD on the other; and those *Fervors* of Spirit they sometimes feel and express in the solemn Services of Religion and Exercises of Devotion, are censured as proceeding from the different Temperament of the Body, and the suitable Workings of a deluded Fancy, or ascribed to Enthusiastick Impulses, or such like imaginary Causes. But let the whole be brought under an impartial Examination, and I doubt not but this will appear a groundless Calumny, to all that shall give sober Reason leave to judge without the Interposure of Prejudice or Passion.

First then, let us consider of those different Apprehensions and Impressions before-mentioned, and see what Scripture and sound Reason teaches us concerning them.

Man, as he is an intelligent Creature, hath a Power con-natural to him, of reflecting upon himself, and judging of his own State and Ways, as he stands in Relation to GOD and Eternity.

Eternity. This *Power of Reflection* is commonly known by the Name of *Conscience* ; which, as it is appointed to be Man's domestick Guide & Monitor to shew him his Way, and mind him of his Duty ; so it is a constant Inspector over him, not only as a *Witness* of what he is and does ; but as a *Judge* also in the Name and Place of GOD to pass *Sentence* upon him, and give him some *Fore-taste* of those future *Joys* or *Sorrows* that shall be the Portion of the Children of Men in another World.

S E C T. II.

Begin we with the *DISTRESSES* of an afflicted Conscience, arising from the Sense of Sin, and God's deserved Wrath for it. This may be considered, either as the Case of one *newly awakened* by the Terrors of GOD to a sad Debate with himself, having hitherto been a Stranger to the State and Way of Holiness ; or of one *already regenerated* and begotten again by renewing Grace ; one that hath formerly experimented in some Degree the Sweetness of a heavenly Life, but is now brought into a dark uncomfortable Condition, through Want of the Sense of God's saving Love, not without sad Impressions of his dreadful Displeasure.

Though I shall not wholly exclude the *former* out of my present Debate, yet it is the *latter* that I intend chiefly to treat of. Those to whom this befalls, during this Distress, walk disconsolately, find little or no Sweetness in any Duty they perform, any Ordinance they attend upon, any Blessing they make use of. Sometimes they strongly suspect, if not peremptorily conclude themselves to be Reprobates and Castaways, to have no Grace in their Hearts, no Part in the Redemption of CHRIST, but to be Enemies of GOD, Captives of *Satan*, and Vessels of Wrath fitted to Destruction. And this is one Part of God's paternal Discipline, wherewith he is pleased to exercise some of his beloved Children ; whether to correct their Unthankfulness under former Enjoyments, or to put their Graces to greater Trial, or to fit them for some special Service, or to humble them for some heinous Sin, and make them more watchful for the future, or to magnify his own Grace in upholding them under all their Agonies, and reviving them after their violent Conflicts ; or for what other holy Ends he may have in it, which we are not now concern'd to discuss. This *spiritual Desertion*, (as
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it hath been hitherto called by sober Divines of all *Persuasions*, as far as I know) admits of Degrees, being not so sharp and dreadful to some as to others; some are but for a while under it, others for several Months or Years: some have a Taste of it in the Time of their Health and Strength, and outward Prosperity; others under bodily Weaknesses, or outward Disturbances, or upon a Death-Bed.

The Case of one in this Distress of Spirit must needs be sad. Solomon tells us, *The Spirit of a Man will sustain his Infirmary: but a wounded Spirit who can bear?* So long as the Spirit remains whole and untoucht, it can bear up under all other Pressures and Troubles. But when the Wound reacheth the Soul, when Conscience affrights the Sinner, when this tells him, (whether truly or mistakingly,) that God hath forsaken him, and cast him off, that the Almighty reckons him his Enemy, and sets him up as a Mark whereon to spend the Arrows of his Indignation; this breaks him all in Pieces, this proves a Weight so heavy, that the burden'd Soul would certainly sink under it, were there not a secret Support vouchsafed by God's gracious Hand. This makes David cry out, *Psal. 51. 3. My Sin is ever before me: and elsewhere; Psal. 38. 2. & seq. Thine Arrows stick fast in me, and thy Hand presseth me sore. There is no Soundness in my Flesh because of thine Anger; neither is there any rest in my Bones because of my Sin. For mine Iniquities are gone over my Head; as an heavy Burden, they are too heavy for me.* ---- Besides other Instances that might be given. Nor can this be a Wonder to any, were these few Things consider'd.

1. *The loving Kindness of God* (as the Psalmist speaks, *Psal. 63. 3.*) *is better than Life.* This is it that makes all a Christian's Enjoyments truly comfortable, and that allays the Bitterness of the most afflicting Crosses, that animates against the sharpest and most dreadful conflicts against all other Evils. Let a Christian live under the Sense of God's reconciling Love, and he passes cheerfully and undauntedly through whatsoever befalls him. Let this therefore be withdrawn, and he is presently overwhelm'd with Darkness. *Psal. 88. 14.* The sweetest Blessings are tasteless, the lightest Afflictions are intolerable: He looks upon God as an Enemy, and now every Thing appears to him as a Messenger of Death.

2. As the Love of God is highly valuable, so *who knows the Power of his Wrath?* *Psal. 90. 11.* If the Sense of this, when

when it fell upon the innocent SON of GOD for the Sin of Man, made *HIM* shrink, and drew from him those doleful Complaints, Joh. 12. 27. *Now is my Soul troubled, and what shall I say?* And, Math. 26. 38. *My Soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto Death.* And again, Math. 27. 46. *My GOD, my GOD, why hast thou forsaken me?* How can guilty Sinners think to grapple with these Terrors? Well might Job cry out as he did in his Distress; Job. 6. 2, 3, 4. *O that my Grief were thoroughly weighed, and my Calamity laid in the Ballances together! For now it would be heavier than the Sand of the Sea, therefore my Words are swallowed up. For the Arrows of the ALMIGHTY are within me, the Poison whereof drinketh up my Spirit: the Terrors of GOD do set themselves in Array against me.* And Heman, Psal. 88. 6, 7. *Thou hast laid me in the lowest Pit, in Darkness, in the Deep. Thy Wrath lieth hard upon me: and thou hast afflicted me with all thy Waves.* And again, Psal. 5. 14, 15, 14. *LORD, why casteth thou off my Soul? Why hidest thou thy Face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die, from my Youth up: while I suffer thy Terrors, I am distracted. Thy fierce Wrath goeth over me: Thy Terrors have cut me off.* How bitterly did Francis Spira express the Dolours of his woful Soul! O (says he) that I might but feel the least Sense of the Love of GOD but for one small Moment, as I now feel his heavy Wrath that burns like the Torments of Hell, within me, and afflicts my Conscience with Pangs unutterable! *Relation of the fearful State of Francis Spira, p. 89.*

3. In this Case the poor distress'd Creature is his own Tormentor. He musters up discouraging Arguments against himself; and catches hold of whatsoever may strengthen his Fears and increase his own Suspicions of himself; and studiously disputes against whatsoever Comforts are offer'd him. Whatsoever Threats he finds in the Word against Hypocrites and Apostates, he is ready to apply to himself: Whatsoever dreadful Examples of GOD's fierce Wrath upon the worst of Sinners he either reads or hears of, he presently puts himself into their Place, and conceits their Condition to be his. The precious Promises of GOD, and the former Experience he hath had of GOD's Goodness to him, all are now turn'd into Matter of Terror and Torment. The Presence of GOD is a Trouble to him, as Job says, Job 23. 15. And the Remem-

remembrance of GOD terrifies him, as the Psalmist speaks, *Psal.* 88. 3. and his Soul refuseth to be comforted.

4. *Satan*, by GOD's Permission, taking Advantage of such a gloomy Season, endeavours, by his horrid Suggestions, to heighten the *Tempest* that is already raised in the Heart of a Christian, as violent Winds increase the Storms in a raging Sea. It is the main Design of that devouring Adversary to destroy utterly. In order to which, as he labours to encourage *careless* Sinners in their *Security* and *Presumption*, so on the contrary he endeavours with all his Might to drive *distressed* Souls into utter *Desperation*. And though he attain not the utmost of his Aims, yet thus much he usually accomplisheth, to exasperate the present Trouble, and increase the Disquietment by his bold and violent Injections. This is sufficiently intimated to us by the *Apostle's* Discourse concerning the incestuous *Corinthian*, who had been cast out of *Church-Communion*; whom he persuades them to receive and comfort, lest he should be swallow'd up with over-much *Sorrow*, 2 *Cor.* 6. 7. adding afterwards, how ready himself was to forgive him, lest *Satan* should take an Advantage, &c. *Ib.* v. 10, 11. Whence we may gather, that this is one of *Satan's* Devices, to tread down such as he finds already cast down with *Sorrow*, and to lay on more Load, where he sees the burden'd Soul now ready to sink.

5. In such a Condition as this, 'till GOD himself be pleased to let in some *Beam* of Light into the disconsolate Heart, no Succour from the Creature, how excellent soever, can give any Relief. The Wound is in the *Soul* and *Spirit*, which none can come at to bind up and heal, but the *FATHER* of *Spirits*, and the GOD of all *Consolation*. *Job* 23. *If he hide his Face, saith Elihu, who then can behold him.* As it is he who had the chief Hand in giving the Wound, so it is he alone that can work the Cure.

(The Remainder in our next.)